

REQUEST FOR A DECLARATION AGAINST THE
SUPPRESSION OF *NOMINA DUBIA*. Z.N.(S.) 1715

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Several recent applicants have asked the Commission to suspend the Rules and suppress *nomina dubia*, in each case for purposes of the Law of Priority but not for purposes of the Law of Homonymy (cf. Code, Article 79a, ii). It is the purpose of the present application to request the Commission to issue a statement of policy that such cases are not to be submitted to the Commission.

2. A Section on "Nomina dubia" appeared in the Bradley Draft of the Code (Article 5, Section 5; cf. *Bull. zool. Nomencl.* 14 : 46, 1957), based on a passage adopted at the Copenhagen Congress. That section was considered at the London Congress, and was deleted in its entirety on the grounds that the normal processes of taxonomy could and should apply, and that the Code need not contain special provisions for treating such names.

3. In the cases recently submitted to the Commission, the applicants did not demonstrate any threat to a well known name, or to any name; indeed, if the description is unrecognizable and the type is lost, there will rarely if ever be any threat. On the rare occasions when a long-lost and authentic type of a *nomen dubium* suddenly comes to light, it may still not be specifically identifiable (broken, immature, or wrong sex or stage). Even if identifiable, it may be a junior synonym, or prove to be a junior homonym when referred to its zoologically correct genus. Even if it proves to be a valid name, it may represent a hitherto unknown species and the name could be used (many species still are known only from the type specimen!). Even if it is found to be the senior synonym of a name in current use, the junior name that is threatened may be of little or no consequence, and the use of priority would disturb no one. If it survives all these chances and is an honest threat to a really important name, then and only then should the plenary powers be invoked.

4. It should be noted that the names are to be retained for purposes of the Law of Homonymy, as prescribed by the Code (Article 79a, ii). Thus the requested suppression does not lighten the burden of the taxonomist; he must still carry along the names in catalogues and consider them in homonymy. In addition, if they are suppressed, he must cite an opinion!

5. In view of the decision of the London Congress to delete provisions governing *nomina dubia*, it is inappropriate—perhaps even unauthorized and illegal, in a sense—for the Commission to accept and process applications to suppress *nomina dubia*. If it is argued that applicants can nevertheless ask for suppression under the plenary powers, it can be pointed out that those powers are to be used only if the application of relevant provisions of the Code "to a particular case would in its judgment disturb stability or universality or cause confusion" (Article 79). Those criteria unquestionably do not apply to a disturbance that does not now exist in fact and that is extremely unlikely ever to exist. The Commission should be freed as much as possible from the work load of unnecessary cases.

6. Accordingly the Commission is requested to issue a Declaration that will formulate in words the intent of the London Congress regarding *nomina dubia*, namely that any *nomen dubium* is to be handled under normal taxonomic procedures, and its suppression is not to be requested unless and until it actually becomes a threat to an important name (by which time, of course, it is no longer a *nomen dubium*).

7. It would also be desirable for the Commission to note in the Declaration that neotypes cannot be proposed for *nomina dubia* merely to revive long-unused names. Such cases would be excluded under Article 75b.